

A brief analysis of the breakthrough and innovation of directing art in the 2000 version of drama Sunrise

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Abstract: Cao Yu's classic trilogy "Thunderstorm", "Sunrise" and "The Wilderness" have always been classic dramas rehearsed and performed by theaters in big cities and drama clubs of colleges and universities, and how to deeply interpret and interpret the classics, how to further excavate deeper cultural and philosophical connotations, and how to conform to the spirit of the times in the current society, these have become the focus and starting point of drama writing, directing and acting in the new era. In 2000, the Beijing People's Art Theater appointed director Ren Ming to rearrange the drama "Sunrise", and this article interprets this version. The modern version of "Sunrise" is a bold breakthrough and innovation in the style of the classic version of "Sunrise", through the re-direction and rearrangement of the play, it skillfully breaks through the thinking pattern of stage imagery, and innovatively integrates traditional and modern elements, giving "Sunrise" a new artistic posture, deepening the connotation interpretation of "Sunrise" in the current era, and narrowing the distance with the audience.

1. Introduction

2017 marks the 110th anniversary of the birth of Chinese drama and the 65th anniversary of the Beijing People's Art Theater. To this end, the Beijing People's Art Theater has performed various preserved classic plays and small theater plays for a year to commemorate performances, and individual plays have toured throughout the country. As a classic play treasured by the Beijing People's Art Theater, "Sunrise" has become a well-deserved classic on the drama stage with its critical profundity and exposed authenticity, and after rehearsal, it is used as the first drama of the new year to wish the audience a happy new year.

Since 1937, "Sunrise" was first directed by Ouyang Yuqian at Shanghai Drama Studio, it has undergone 14 versions of performance changes. Director Ren Ming has rearranged "Sunrise" four times from 2000 to this day. For the audience, "Sunrise" after each rearrangement has a new feeling and understanding, and for the director, it is a sense of achievement to constantly explore the new deep connotation of classic art. In fact, before the first rehearsal of "Sunrise", Ren Ming participated in the "Sunrise" rehearsal of the Singapore "Art Federation" in 1998, and this rehearsal was faithfully in accordance with the time, place and background set in Cao Yu's original play, the performance effect was good. In 2000, to commemorate the 90th anniversary of Cao Yu's birth, the Beijing People's

Art Theater appointed Ren Ming to rehearse "Sunrise", and the idea that the theater should follow a realist style was replaced by the idea of a new director. In Ren Ming's view: "There are many things in 'Sunrise' that span time and space, whether it is to express the past, today or the future, it is of special significance, and arranging a modern version of 'Sunrise' may be more attractive... These characters in Cao Yu's play, whether in the past or today, or in the future, they are still alive. Because he wrote very deeply about the human character and human nature." [1] Under such artistic innovation, a modern version of "Sunrise" with elements of a new era took to the stage.

2. Innovation in the drama arrangement

Meierkhold, Vsevolod Emilievich once claimed that the director was the author of the show. From the perspective of the entire rehearsal process of the drama, the director is the ideator and creator of the stage performance, the temporal and spatial processing of the stage and the drama itself, include the audiovisual image structure, also need to be communicated by the director and professional designers, to complete the set, lighting and sound design. In order to fully reflect the director's re-examination and understanding the connotation of the script, it is necessary for the director to have a unique creative conception of the set, lighting and sound lights, and to carry out centralized shooting and leadership of the whole play.

No matter what kind of art, its vigorous vitality lies in innovation, and "innovation is an activity that is particularly individual." [2] The formation of innovative ideas is often the product of imagination and conceptual power when they can fill a new theoretical framework, it is not a new creation without precedent, nor is it a conjecture generated out of thin air, but a breakthrough activity within a limited scope. Break through traditional experience, jump out of the established scope, break the existing rules of art, to seek a brand-new way of expression that is easier to express and easier to understand. In Ren Ming's conception, the modern version of "Sunrise" in 2000, the first, second and fourth acts are completely based on the contemporary millennial living environment, and the set is also a modern life scene. The third act follows the original drama script, that stage settings and lighting design based on the 1930s. The use of stitching techniques to connect the two eras is striking, and its sharp contrast brings a strong visual impact to the audience.

Unlike the dark and gloomy room described at the beginning of the script of "Sunrise", the modern version of "Sunrise" has a lifting stage slowly rising before the curtain opens, at the same time, the characters in the play dance wildly under the leadership of the dancers. At this time, the curtain quickly opened, the noisy background music with postmodern industrial attributes became more and more intense, after the hot dance, Chen Bailu dressed in fashionable and gorgeous clothes, swayed her body in the center of the stage sharply. The strong rhythm of the music drives and controls the various characters, and their limbs sway from side to side irregularly and casually, in addition to Fang Dasheng, George Zhang, Xiao Dongxi, Pan Yueting, Li Shiqing, Huang Sanxing, etc. were dancing wildly in the music. This method of expression is intended to show that no one can escape the clutches of the material society, and in the transmission of the spiritual theme, the modern version of "Sunrise" closely follows the original work while conforming to the actual characteristics of the era of commodity economic development. The small stage in front slowly descended, everyone left with the stage, Chen Bailu had been happy all night in the dance hall, it's time for her to rest. The background music was replaced by soothing European and American pop music, at this time, Fang Dasheng leaned against the door frame to appear.

3. Breakthrough in stage imagery

Exquisite crystal lamps, luxurious sofa and TVs, fashionable character costumes, hot European and American pop music, etc., all show the state of China's rapid economic development at the turn

of the century, representing the luxurious life of the rich class, even if the background of the times changes, but the cruel reality of oppressing and cannibalizing people still exists. The greatness of the classic lies in its philosophical propositional meaning beyond the times, the vastness of excavation and discussion, and the inclusiveness and eternity of the deep meaning of the play itself.

The huge mirror half-hidden in the dark behind the left side of the sofa is a very connotative stage image, and in other versions or the original script, the role of the mirror in Chen Bailu's room is limited to her self-talk, self-pity and self-pity about her appearance and figure: "(She looked back and forth, left and right, a beautiful woman inside, she slowly faced the mirror, shook her head and sighed sadly) It's not too ugly. (Take a pause) I'm probably not too old. But..."[3] The mirror is an object, which Ren Ming keenly extracted from the script and shaped into a stage image, giving it an unprecedented and important role. A mirror, as large as a door, stands on the left and rear side of the stage, and the position is carefully measured and proofread. Through the exquisite angle of the mirror, the characters who come and go are refracted through this mirror, like an observer sent by Jinba to hide in the shadows, secretly monitoring and controlling everything in the outside world, but the people in it are completely unknowns.

This mirror is special, it's not an ordinary dressing mirror, it's like a distorting mirror that can reflect a deformed and distorted portrait. This mirror just like a "monster-revealing mirror", presenting the true appearance of various characters under the torrent of the times. Fang Dasheng, who is truly straightforward. Chen Bailu, who understands life but has no choice. Pan Yueting, who is greedy and cunning. Li Shiqing, who is depressed. Xiao Dongxi, who is miserable and pitiful. Wang Fusheng, who often bullies poor people, and Huang Sanxing, who is cowardly and incompetent... In that era, no one can be spared the distortion of human nature. The increase and innovation of stage imagery had give the audience a new perspective and spiritual inspiration. With the advancement of the times, classic dramas are also changing and innovating, and the core of the play had also acquired a deeper meaning: the economic development of the times has led to the distortion of human nature and the tragedy of human nature.

4. Fusion of tradition and modernity

In the stage set, Ren Ming has always emphasized aesthetics and doesn't very emphatically require realism, and this version of "Sunrise" requires modern style and beauty, which can reflect the combination of modern beauty and classical beauty. Different from the first, second and fourth acts, with a strong sense of the times, the stage set of the third act is more special, it's strictly following the characteristics of the thirties era, with gown and mandarin jacket, classical cheongsam, old tables, old chairs, old screens, and half-hidden bamboo curtains, all of these sets make you feel as if you were in that era. Regarding Ren Ming's conception of "Sunrise", he insists on blending tradition and modernity in the overall style. He believes that "As a director, you must think of the audience during the current era, and never forget that the play is for the audience. First of all, my positioning at that time was to be drama easy to understand, to make the audience understand. Drama can only be wonderful when it's easier for people to understand. "[1] Grafting the will of the thirties plays into modern life can make it faster for the audience to integrate their own real-life situations and understand the play.

In the thirties of the 20th century, at the beginning of the publication of "Sunrise", the third act had caused heated discussions in the literary circle, and the literary column of Ta Kung Pao even concentrated literary criticism and comments of it, and in the face of the critics' "difficulty" of the third act, Cao Yu had his own ample reasons for keeping it: "If one thinks that the story of Xiao Dongxi is not much related to the main action and should be cut out, then the so-called 'main action' also has not been in this play... If Sunrise is somewhat vivid and has a sense of social reality, then

Xiao Dongxi, Cui Xi, Xiao Shunzi, and the various people in that hell, which should also be the factors that make up this truth..."[4] It is precisely because of the portrayal of the complicated human life at the bottom of society in the third act, that the artistic structure of Sunrise can be more complete, and the artistic value can be fully embodied, and the cruel social truth and the deep human analysis behind the play can find a breakthrough in the text. It can be said that Cao Yu's exertion and affection for the third act is extremely profound, both in terms of the preparation of the material in the early stages of the play and the conception during the writing process.

Ren Ming's original restoration of the third act makes the entire play have a span in time, with both gown and mandarin jacket and suit ties, both the golden splendor in the first, second, fourth acts and the black and white main tone in the third act. The strong contrast between the two very different styles of staging deepens the bipolar effect of the play's representation of the gap between rich and poor. The huge rotating stage installation also expands and strengthens the expressive core of the play. At the end of the play, with the death of Chen Bailu, the entire stage set began to rotate, from modern society to the twenties and thirties, and then from the twenties and thirties to the resplendent modern hotel. The transition between the two different stage sets is not only the change of eras, but more importantly the connection and presentation of the commonalities and similarities between the two eras. This special stage art can often bring the audience a more intuitive and effective spiritual shock, achieve the sublimation of the understanding of the play at the moment of stage rotation, and greatly deepen the audience's grasp of the spiritual core of the play. In this way, Ren Ming gives the audience direct hints and points, fully interpreting the central purpose of Cao Yu's play, and also conveying to the audience his understanding of "Sunrise" in the new era: rich and poor are everywhere, darkness and light are always present. While echoing the audience's "expectant vision", it also allows the audience to get a spiritual understanding unexpectedly.

5. Conclusions

After the performance of this version of "Sunrise", like the heated discussion and questioning suffered by Cao Yu, Ren Ming's artistic method of stitching modern and classical to explain the classics attracted the attention of many playwrights and critics. Some critics evaluate it in terms of the totality of dramatic expression, argued that it doesn't achieve formal unity of the four-act play. They argued that while the first, second and fourth acts were moved to the modern era, the third act remained the same as it was in the 1930s, making the whole performance out of place, while the status of the third act was also revisited and the performance was considered unsatisfactory. When Ye Yanfang talked about the modern props of "Sunrise", such as dance halls, television, laptops, foreign music, etc., and the treatment of the ending, she believed that it did not coincide with the theme of "Sunrise", and the tragic power was not enough, and the hot dance at the beginning was not the Beijing People's Art Theater style.[5]

For Ren Ming, he is personally satisfied with the overall effect of this drama performance, and he regards the directing work of this play as a summary of his directing art in the past ten years since entering Beijing People's Art Theater. He once confessed that: "Since rehearsing 'The Homecoming' in 1989, my view of drama and aesthetics have undergone great changes in this decade. My thinking is that the Beijing People's Art Theater, including my creations, must first inherit the excellent tradition, but at the same time develop and innovate. This is a pursuit of mine and an awareness of my theater. " [1] It can be seen that he attaches great importance to the Beijing People's Art Theater's theatrical tradition of focusing on realism.

On the basis of inheriting the artistic style of Beijing People's Art Theatre, his innovation of stage art elements and means of expression enables it to carry the characteristics of the current era, it can adapt to the aesthetic needs of contemporary audiences with uniqueness and brilliance. For example,

the huge but deformed mirror in this play, and the two eras that are constantly changing through stage rotation, are expressive and symbolic elements added to the realist stage space. The stage space shifted from realism to expressionism, realizing the intersection of the audience's inner world and the real world. This kind of spatial interlacing not only brings innovation in the performance form of "Sunrise", but also effectively renders the emotional atmosphere of the performance. This intertwining of time and space can also stimulate the emotional resonance between the stage performance and the audience, enhance the reflection of "Sunrise" on the theme.

The modernity character brought by the artistic innovation of "Sunrise", it lead us to turn our perspective to the exploration of the problem about Chinese theatrical modernity, which can be said to be an innovative exploration and attempt to connect aesthetic feelings and the constituent elements of works. Changes in many elements such as stage design, stage sets, stage lighting, and actors' performances can directly affect or even lead the audience's aesthetic perspective. Guided by explicit external scenes and implicit play ideas, the elements of modernity brought about by theatrical innovation are often emotional fit points that resonate highly with the audience. The modern version of "Sunrise" captures the audience's existing experience of modern life and finds the angle of emotional fit. The modern version of Sunrise successfully expands the audience's imagination of the classical version of Sunrise, gives Sunrise a new artistic posture, deepens the connotation interpretation of Sunrise in today's time, and brings it closer to the audience.

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